

NEWS

TEMPE WORKS PROJECT CONCLUDED

The Tempe Works Project will conclude operations in February 2001 at the end of a two-year demonstration period. Tempe Works was collaboratively created as a pilot project by Tempe Community Action Agency (TCAA), Tempe Chamber of Commerce, and Tempe Community Council in the advent of Welfare Reform in 1997. The three organizations came together to help low-income families seeking employment opportunities for self-sufficiency, and try to fulfill the parallel needs of employers who sought to hire and retain skilled workers in an increasingly competitive business environment.



The partners were awarded a two-year demonstration grant for a total of \$100,000 from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Workforce Development Initiative, and a grant of \$100,000 from the Valley of the Sun United Way Helping the Working Poor Funds. Program staff were hired by TCAA and the Tempe Chamber of Commerce in March 1998, and client services began in May 1998. Model Employers were recruited to both employ clients and to advise on development of the project.

The program design was restructured during the project period in an attempt to fulfill the intended project outcome of employment retention and advancement for participants, and to recruit more clients. Ironically, the Tempe Works partners believe that the booming economy adversely impacted the project. Because jobs could more easily be obtained, the number of persons who requested employment-related assistance declined. Individuals who were unable to secure at least entry-level jobs on their own tended to have more complex barriers to employment than anticipated. While business participants actively sought new employees for their workforces, many were not so willing to change personnel practices to accommodate applicants with multiple problems. Those clients who sought help tended to be in crisis and intent on addressing immediate, survival needs, rather than the long-term benefits of developing new skills, job advancement and self-sufficiency. The Tempe Works clientele became transient and follow-up contact was difficult.

A number of the individuals and families were successfully assisted however, and TCAA will transition services for all active clients to its ongoing Community Action Program when Tempe Works concludes. TCAA also plans to strengthen its Job Search Network which has related goals.

One of the greatest benefits to arise from this demonstration project was the partnership developed among the three organizations. TCAA, the Tempe Chamber of Commerce and Tempe Community Council have agreed to continue working together to apply the lessons learned from Tempe Works to the continuing needs of workforce development and helping hard-to-employ Tempeans find and keep good jobs.